

# What if Oedipus or Polynices had been a Slave? Antigone's Burial of Polynices

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Examination of Sophocles' *Antigone* reveals how the corpse remains a historically, culturally and politically inscribed subject. To leave Polynices' corpse, by Creon's decree, to the open air to be consumed by carrion is electively to erase Polynices' status as an Athenian citizen and transubstantiate the materiality of the corpse into one that is immaterial and non-human – that of a slave. Antigone's refusal to leave the unburied remains of her brother - a refusal that has been traditionally romanticized as an act of rebellion against authoritarian control - circumscribes and reifies class boundaries between the free, the civilized, and the unfree, uncivilized slave. In effect, Polynices' unburied body unearths the ways in which a "western, hegemonic canon" has electively buried a history of chattel slavery that has made much of this cultural output possible. An engagement with particularly notable ruminations on Antigone, such as Hegel's and Derrida's, serves to exemplify how the "figure of Antigone has been appropriated in ways that consolidate, rather than disrupt, a tradition of thought that evades its own implication in slavery and colonialism.

If Antigone contains the pollution that the corpse of her unburied brother threatens to unleash on Thebes, she does so only at the expense of consolidating a way of thinking that structured classical Athens, and which, I argue here, also structures Sophocles' Oedipal cycle. The exposure of the corpses of slaves—and Antigone's unproblematic appeal to it as a given—is symptomatic of a practice that Sophocles' brings into question in numerous ways. Yet Sophocles' attention to and problematization of the practice of slavery in *Antigone* has gone largely unnoticed, rendered invisible by western commentators invested in playing down new world slavery and colonialism. The significance of Antigone's insistence upon burying her brother needs to be assessed in the light of contrasting Persian practices of exposing corpses precisely in order that they can be consumed as carrion by vultures. Antigone's distinction of her brother from a slave is also a delineation of a free, cultured individual from a barbarian, non-Athenian slave.<sup>1</sup>

The Sophoclean tragic cycle stands as exemplary for western culture in so many diverse ways, the exemplarity of which has been expounded by various philosophical, psychoanalytic and literary figures, some of whom have themselves founded schools of thought (Aristotle, Hegel, Freud). Yet all too rarely have the exponents of Sophocles' Oedipus or Antigone been willing or able to take on and think through the paradox that these literary,

philosophical, psychoanalytic heroes were penned by an aristocratic author whose “leisure” time to conceive, write, and perform his exemplary tragedies was bought at the expense of a system of chattel slavery that it is considered in some circles in bad taste even to mention. In other circles the historical fact of Athenian slavery tends to be minimized, peremptorily dismissed, or excused on the pretext that if the suffering of some enabled the genius of others, if Athens was built on a system of slavery, and if that is what it took to produce the literary heroes that have become heroes of more than one empire, then so be it.<sup>2</sup> The achievements of ancient Athenian society are glorified in a manner that encourages a certain evasion of our own implication in empires built on slavery and colonialism. In what follows I suggest that slavery is very much at issue, even in tragedies, such as *Antigone*, whose interpretive legacy might imply otherwise.

Sophocles’ *Oedipal Cycle* can be read as negotiating, reflecting and differentiating between two different models of marriage, an archaic model based upon exogamy, and the newly emergent one that was more characteristic of the limited democracy of the city of Athens in the fifth century BC, which tended towards endogamy. Central to the question of whether to marry outside or inside a group is how that group is constituted: who qualifies as someone outside the group, and how are such identities distinguishable from those inside the group? How are the boundaries of the group delineated? What constitutes heterogeneity, and what homogeneity? What is the role of birth, lineage, culture, politics, language, or rationality? What does it mean to be an outsider or a foreigner? What does it mean to be an insider? What is the province of law, what is that of convention, and how does one inform the other?

Since the issue of how to constitute a group is at stake, so too is the issue of how one’s membership of a particular group is determined, and how group identity is passed on. Questions of purity or impurity, recognition and misrecognition, and the possibility of contamination figure writ large. The need to forge or enforce certain distinctions, to stipulate legality, conventions of rule and governance, and the determination of political rights—all these issues are fairly obviously at play in Greek tragedy. Thrown into the mix, but often subordinated to the concerns that most interpretive legacies have treated as self-evident, is the paradox that the Oedipal cycle, and the tragic dramas more or less cotemporaneous with it, is written during a period when aristocratic, archaic rule is giving way to democratic rule in Athens, and yet the democracy that was emerging based itself upon a slave society.<sup>3</sup>

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Antigone has been endowed with a death wish, with an unnatural attachment to her dead brother—an attachment that has been read in Oedipal terms, one that she elevates above all other familial connections, including Haemon and Ismene. She has been read as if she exhibited an abnormal aversion to marriage, to femininity, and to her reproductive destiny. Yet what such readings leave aside is the profound confusion into which Oedipus's parricide and incest throws his family and his city, a confusion that is reflected by the order in which the plays are written, and which is both generational and conceptual. In *Antigone*, everything appears to be in disarray, not least conventional roles. In a world where women are silenced and marginalized, confined indoors for the most part, seen as unfit for politics, excluded from decision-making, in need of constant male guardianship, incapable of acting as legal subjects, ostensibly given to the pleasures of Eros, and therefore subject to close scrutiny to ensure the legitimacy of male heirs, Antigone's character breaks all the rules.<sup>4</sup> She flouts the authority of Creon, her *kurios*, or familial guardian, and her king, refuses marriage and childbearing altogether, she insists on the superiority of her beliefs, and she threatens the established balance of power between male and female, king and subject.<sup>5</sup> She will not be governed by Creon's rule at any level.<sup>6</sup> She will be mastered by no one but herself, preferring death to compromise, preferring death to life.

Given the expectation that women married young and perpetuated the family line, Antigone's refusal of marriage, her substitution of Polynices for Haemon, and her subsequent symbolic marriage to death, is seen as calling into question the economy of exchange, or what Gayle Rubin has called the "traffic in women."<sup>7</sup> According to this system, the exchange of women from their birth family to the family into which they marry was orchestrated by the male guardian or *kurios*. In Antigone's case, Creon is both the *kurios*, the one who expects to give away the bride, and the father of the one who expects to receive her—a doubling of identity that echoes all the other doubled identities that structure the Oedipal myth.

No sooner is this said than the full complexity of the symbolic challenge definitive of the kinship relations that situate Antigone begins to impose itself. For, as Derrida has observed so appositely, and with such devastating irony, hers is no ordinary family. Creon is both king and uncle to Antigone, whose relationship to Oedipus and Polynices suffers from a profound generational confusion. If Oedipus is both son and husband to Jocasta, both father and brother to Antigone, Antigone is both sister

and aunt to Polynices. As the daughter of Oedipus, Antigone is sister to Polynices and Eteocles, and as the half sister of Oedipus, she is aunt to her brothers. She is the daughter of a previous king (Oedipus), but she is also (via Jocasta) his half sister. She is the sister/aunt of previous kings, who mutually contest one another's right to be king (Polynices and Eteocles), and the wife-to-be of King Creon's son (Haemon). Creon has inherited the throne as a function of the unwavering refusal of Athenian inheritance law to recognize women as legal subjects, and of Athenian culture to view women as subjects capable of competent decision making or of political leadership. Antigone's violation of Creon's edict is as much a marking out of the structure that ensures the exchange of women as it is a refusal to obey Creon's edict, or to marry Haemon. For how can Antigone be exchanged from one *oikos* to another, when she is already included in the *oikos* to which she is destined? As her legal guardian, her *kurios*, Creon would have to give his niece Antigone away to his own son. The generational distinction between father and son is precisely that which Oedipus has conflated; in Antigone's case, the distinction between the function of the father, in this case Creon, as the one who, according to convention, should give Antigone away, and his son, in this case Haemon, the one who should receive her, is obscured. Oedipus's act of incest has rendered the distinction between the father as donor and recipient as son inoperative. Unless this distinction is clarified, the *oikos* into which Antigone would be received is the very same as that which cedes her—an impressive blockage indeed!

Antigone's refusal to be the object of exchange between Creon and Haemon, her refusal to make the transition from virgin to wife marks a breakdown of her passage from one household to another, a breakdown that is inscribed not merely in her obstinacy, but in the logic of her excessively compounded identity—for which, true to Hegel's reading of tragedy—Antigone takes responsibility. In refusing to follow through on her proposed marriage to Haemon, Antigone draws attention to and renders problematic the endogamous trend of marriage practices that are ascendant in Athens, the difficulty within the Oedipal family of separating the father from the son, and the status of women in the exchange that is expected of them in marriage. In this particular family, the logic of gift-giving is exposed as aporetic; some might say that aporetic relations are at the heart of such a logic at the best of times. In this sense Antigone's refusal to be the object of exchange points out a more general problematic within the logic of the exchange system, in which women must pass from one guardian to

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another. Antigone raises the question of the nature of the gift as such. Antigone's blocked passage metonymically evinces not merely her refusal to be exchanged by Creon, but rather the impossibility of this exchange in her particular case, an impossibility predicated on the failure of the Oedipal family to maintain a distinction between the symbolic role of the father and that of the son. More importantly it points out the impossibility of a system that looks exclusively inward, threatening to become ever more incestuous, ever more exclusionary, ever more allergic to outsiders, ever more protective of its borders—a system that is in danger, we might say of autoimmunity.

So concerned is Athens to patrol its borders, so concerned is it to protect its wealth from foreign interlopers, and so concerned is Creon to consolidate wealth, that—Sophocles' hyperbolic representation of this incestuous family suggests—both *polis* and *oikos* are in danger of undermining their own systems of exchange, of administering their own poison to precisely the body politic they are trying so hard to protect from outside corruption. Measures adopted to ensure the stability of the polis are liable to stagnate it. Athens is in danger of an infection that spreads not from without, but from within, and it is Creon, as much as Oedipus, who constitutes the threat. Ignorant of who he is and what he has done, Oedipus dramatically figures a contamination of Thebes. He poses a danger to the security of the polis, threatening its stability, and passing on the confusion of his identity to his children, who do not fail to follow out the ramifications of Oedipal ignorance about the meaning of his identity and the significance of his deeds. Killing each other in mutual combat, Polynices and Eteocles bequeath their familial confusion to Antigone, who confronts it, abruptly arresting the logic of the apparently inevitable familial curse, opting out, refusing to play any of the roles that might have been expected of her. Faced first with the consequences of the multiple familial identities of Oedipus, and then with the threat of impurity that Polynices' exposed corpse represents, Antigone puts a stop to the logic of misplaced identity and morality gone awry, blocking the impulse to turn ever more inward, challenging the need to consolidate boundaries by keeping it all within the family. To say that Antigone is acting out, that she is too stubborn, is to miss the point: she is what she is, but in becoming so resolutely that which she is, by adhering obstinately to the extremely limited role allotted to her as a woman, she also disrupts what it means to be a woman. She becomes other than the obedient, passive woman that Creon and his ilk wants her to be.

If Oedipus is the exemplary hero, and if his exemplariness has been traditionally said to inhere in the manner in which he faces up to the dilemma in which he finds himself, are there not perhaps also exemplary evasions that he performs, enigmas that remain to be unraveled? If Oedipus turns out to play the role of both prosecuting judge and criminal, subject and object, investigator and object of investigation, perhaps there is a sense in which his ambiguous duality resonates beyond the particular crimes of which he commits himself. He can also be read as calling attention to the logic according to which free men set themselves up as kings, rulers, and law-givers, while their freedom—including their freedom to rule free men—is premised upon the subjugation, in the form of slavery, of others. Emphasizing the way in which excessive attempts at control over the city turn into failure not only of the ruler's attempt to govern the city, but also for the sovereign attempt to govern the self, Froma Zeitlin has suggested that central to tragedy are the issues of power over the self, over others, over the city and over one's own body.<sup>8</sup> The question of self control, and the desire to avoid being associated with slavery at all costs was crucial for Athenian citizens (all of whom were men, if the term citizen is taken to include full political rights), both in terms of being master of oneself, rather than working for another, and in terms of not being slavishly dependent on bodily appetites or desires.<sup>9</sup> As N.R.E. Fisher says, in Athens "An important part of what being a citizen meant was not being manhandled by other citizens." In this context he quotes Demosthenes as follows:

If you (the jury) wished to look into what makes the difference between a slave and a free man, you would find that the greatest distinction was that in the case of slaves it is the body which takes responsibility for all their offences, whereas it is possible for free men, however great their misfortunes, to protect their bodies (Fisher, 56).

Yet in his misfortune, far from protecting his body, Oedipus impales himself, marking himself as infirm forever, becoming other to himself in the process, and thereby differentiating himself from the too close proximity or sameness that has indelibly marked his familial relationships. When Jocasta implores Oedipus to desist from further enquiry after the messenger from Corinth tells him that he was a foundling, Oedipus assumes that Jocasta is worried about the possibility that she will discover that he is of low birth. He is afraid that he might turn out to be the son of a slave (see Vernant

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and Vidal-Naquet 1990, 107). Could it be that, once he discovers the true reason for Jocasta's attempt to dissuade him, Oedipus blinds himself not just because he cannot bear to look upon what he has done, but also because in scarring his body, he inflicts upon himself his fear that he is nothing but a slave? He inscribes upon his own body the scars that double those of his birth, marking him out as doubly defiled, in a world where bodily scarring would usually have been reserved for those who were subject to the control of their masters. The beating of slaves, whose bodies in an important sense were not their own, was commonplace. The body of Oedipus had already been marked shortly after his birth, as a result of his feet being bound together. Lacking the fleet-footed movement of Achilles, Oedipus' bodily movement is marred by a deficiency. He is not as itinerant as others, does not move as quickly as others away from his family, at least not by his own locomotion. Or rather he returns home too quickly, unlike Odysseus's slow and circuitous progress. At the foot of his body, his feet are marked, and he himself marks his face, putting out his own eyes and obliterating his vision, mimicking physically the blindness that afflicted him about his own history, origins, and people. From top to bottom he is a marked man. Marked, or tattooed like a slave, at the foot of his body with an emblem of a divine, Dionysiac curse, since Laius drunk too much and impregnated Jocasta, failing to observe the divine taboo against their generation of children, planting the seed of Oedipus, who himself will reproduce the parental sign that impairs his body, but with a difference.<sup>10</sup> By blinding himself, Oedipus inscribes on his body the blindness that has dogged his self-knowledge, his failure to have known his origins. His violent inscription is perhaps an act of hubris, since he acts in a godlike manner, and yet it also serves to bring him down to the level of the most humbled men of the city. He is the sovereign exile, the highest and the lowest. Outside the law, above and below, its executor as king, yet at the same time victim of the law that convicts him, Oedipus is the casualty of a familial curse, subject to the law of destiny while subject of the law as king, wielding the law and felled by his own, sovereign hand. In failing to master himself, Oedipus fails to master his kingdom, and in this respect he becomes the mirror image of Creon, who, in failing to master his kingdom, fails to master himself.

Oedipus enters Thebes as if he were a foreigner. It is as a foreigner that he accedes to the throne of Thebes, and marries Jocasta, who gives birth to his four children. Yet, his family lineage eventually proves that far from being a foreigner by birth, Oedipus is in fact a member of the royal

family into which he has inadvertently married. Having been estranged from his family, put at a distance from them so that he cannot endanger them, he rejoins them, only to unknowingly kill his father and marry his mother, thereby fulfilling the prophecy that Laius and Jocasta had tried to avert, enacting in an extreme, hyperbolic form the recent Athenian turn toward endogamy. Yet, at the same time he enacts, to his knowledge, an exogamous marriage with a woman previously unknown to him, one who is given to him as a gift for his presence of mind (ironically enough) for solving the riddle of the Sphinx. As such, Oedipus comes to stand both for the stranger (*xenos*), the foreigner, the interloper, the other, and at the same time, the familiar, the insider, the one who is not only close by, but intimately related.<sup>11</sup> Through the figure of Oedipus, Sophocles confronts the anxiety about how to recognize a member of one's own family, how to know that one's son really is one's son, one's father is really one's father, and one's mother is really one's mother.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, he confronts an anxiety about what happens when foreigners (ostensible or otherwise) enter one's homeland, assume rule, and turn out not to be the savior that they set themselves up to be, or that the citizenry thought or hoped they might be. This is not quite invasion, it is not quite conquering, it is not quite war, but events do unfold as if a foreigner entered the inside of a space and took it over. In this sense, Oedipus is a condensation of the stranger and the blood-relative, the outsider and the insider, the enemy and the friend, all rolled into one, of the dangers inherent in failing to properly distinguish them, yet at the same time of the impossibility and perhaps undesirability of imposing rigid distinctions in law-like ways.<sup>13</sup> Oedipus learns from experience, but he learns too late that intellectual prowess is not enough. Knowing the world requires a certain self-understanding that is elusive because one's feelings, affects, intentions are not clearly reflected in the world, because others intervene, helping to construct situations that are constituted by complex, multiple and not always self-transparent motives, situations that are produced by and produce material effects, which are more or less opaque.

In 451 BC Pericles introduced a law in Athens, prohibiting the marriage of Athenian women to foreigners.<sup>14</sup> The law, and its effects, epitomizes in many ways the intersecting set of concerns that I suggest informs Sophocles' Oedipal cycle. As a result of the law, when a dispute arose over the distribution of a gift of grain, given to Athenians by the king of Egypt, the claims of many were disqualified because they were determined to be



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illegitimate by birth, and were subsequently sold into slavery.<sup>15</sup> The law is understood to have merely formalized a practice that was already underway, namely that of marrying within, rather than outside, the city.<sup>16</sup> In fact, as Vernant points out, this tendency toward endogamy was taken to an extreme in myth, where we find “many instances . . . of unions within a single family, marriages between close relatives, and exchanges of daughters between brothers” (1990, 70). In this context, Oedipus – who marries Jocasta on the assumption that he is a foreigner, but who turns out after all to be a member of her own family, indeed her own son – could have been received by an Athenian audience in 429 BC both as transgressing the relatively recent law preventing exogamy, and as conforming to the relatively new practice of endogamy. At the same time, Sophocles might be read as drawing attention to the contingency of law, both law in general, and this particular law, which related to foreigners, and resulted in the enslavement of many whose claim to be Athenian had remained previously uncontested.<sup>17</sup> Read as a historical figure of mythical Thebes, Oedipus the foreigner (as far as he knows) would not have been violating any law in marrying Jocasta, but read in terms of the practices contemporary to Sophocles’ Athens, he would have been in violation of the law. As the son of Jocasta, Oedipus would have been violating the archaic practice of exogamy, whereas read against the practice that had become conventional in Athens and was enshrined in law by 451, he would not have been in such clear violation of the law. Nor should the repercussions the law had for determining who would become slaves be forgotten.

The distinction between citizen and foreigner is not the only one that Oedipus’s birth and circumstances appear to put into question. Had the circumstances of his literary birth been slightly different, there is a good chance that Oedipus the King might have been a slave. Had his parents been poor, and had they not resorted to abandoning him on Mount Cithaeron, outside the city of Thebes, the infant Oedipus might have been entrusted to magistrates, and sold into slavery. A prohibition existed in Thebes against the exposure of infants, so when Jocasta and Laius exposed Oedipus to die, in their attempt to avert the oracle that foretold of Laius’s death at the hands of a child to be born to them, they put themselves outside of the Theban law.<sup>18</sup> Transgression of the law and exposure to the elements take on another guise when Oedipus commits incest, and when, in violation of Creon’s edict, Antigone buries Polynices. In doing so, of course, Antigone appeals to a higher law, a divine law, and in this sense she does not cast the

act of burial as transgression, but rather as an acknowledgment of Polynices' humanity. As they are so often in the Oedipal cycle, events are doubled, echoing and calling to one another across and within the plays. Oedipus is not the only character for whom the shadow of slavery casts its specter. In reaction to what he sees as Polynices' attempt to enslave Thebes, Creon responds by acting in a way that could itself be construed as slavish. As H.S. Harris puts it, "To leave the dead unburied is unGreek, barbaric."<sup>19</sup> When Antigone stipulates that Polynices is not a slave, but her brother, she is contesting Creon's dishonoring of Polynices in death, but she is also appealing to and reinscribing a distinction between the humanity of the aristocracy to which her family belongs and the inferior status of slaves.<sup>20</sup> Antigone does not want to leave the corpse of Polynices to the dogs and the birds, but would have no such qualms had he been a slave, rather than her brother.

The possibility that Antigone might have had a half brother who was also a slave is hardly outlandish, and her wish to distinguish Polynices—who is a full brother, that is, born to both her mother and father—from a slave is at the same time a way of recognizing the high birth of her mother, with whom Antigone aligns herself.<sup>21</sup> By the same token, since marriage conferred respectability upon women, and Antigone refuses marriage, she is refusing to be respectable in the conventional way.<sup>22</sup> If Antigone identifies herself with her mother in one way—her relation to Jocasta establishes her aristocratic lineage—she distinguishes herself from Jocasta in another way.<sup>23</sup> The act of differentiation is a complex one, which rejects any form of marriage, in order to avert any possibility of repeating the familial pattern of incest, while it also calls attention to the problems inherent in any understanding of marriage in which women are reduced to mere tokens. Antigone will not marry, and she most certainly will not marry someone that turns out to be her own son.

If we take the 451 law into account—a legal prohibition against marrying foreigners that led to the enslavement of many who were now judged illegitimate—it would seem that a primary concern in Athens was to keep male outsiders out, or rather (and this is crucial) to keep them from legitimately inheriting Athenian wealth. That is, foreigners could become slaves, but they could not amass wealth, or rather they could only do so on their masters' say so. Manumission—sometimes attained through slave earnings, which could accumulate until a slave was able to buy their own freedom, and sometimes written into a will—was at the master's discretion.

From the grave, then, the ghostly power of a master could extend across the divide of the dead and the living to free a slave.

As they worked, slaves were contained within the city as inferiors, as subject to those whose wealth became the basis of the slave's subjection. Significant numbers of people were relegated to a slave class as a direct result of a law that ostensibly concerned the marriage of women to foreigners. The inclusion of foreign men within the polis for the purposes of slave labor was thereby deemed acceptable, but their inclusion as fully fledged participants of the practices they supported and afforded the polis (foremost among them the flourishing of the arts, the development of a limited representative democracy, and the concentration of wealth) was unacceptable. Excluded from participatory democracy, foreigners were nevertheless included for the purposes of accruing the benefits of their labor. In controlling the exchange of women, certain boundaries were therefore erected, boundaries which had as much to do with imposing requirements for the acquisition of wealth and selling those whose birth was not deemed pure into slavery, as it did with anything else. In the interests of perpetuating the wealth, culture, and stability of Athens within its city walls, attempts were being made to circumscribe very precisely who could, and who could not enjoy the benefits of fully belonging to the polis, by inheriting its wealth, and by participating in its democratic procedures.

Family, kinship, and sexual difference have constituted the prevailing terms in which Sophocles' *Antigone* has been taken up by a western philosophical and psychoanalytic tradition that has been heavily overdetermined by Hegel. Jacques Derrida, for example, tackles Antigone's place in the Hegelian corpus by situating it within a meditation on the family. Luce Irigaray and Butler, while providing crucial challenges to orthodox Hegelian interpretations from the perspectives of feminist and queer theory, at the same time emphasize the importance of kinship and sexuality, thereby rejoining the Hegelian tradition even as they undermine it in other ways. While Irigaray reads Antigone as symptomatic of a crisis that implicates not only the family and the state, but philosophical thinking itself, Butler inflects this insight in a way that exposes the heteronormative bias not only of Hegel and Lacan, but also of Irigaray. Both Irigaray and Butler, albeit in different ways, read Antigone as an excluded but facilitating other, thereby following up Derrida's discourse in more than one way. Both develop Derrida's reflections in terms of that which is remaindered in Hegel's thought, or the abject in Jean Genet's language, and both make good on

Derrida's insertion of a psychoanalytic strand of thinking into his narrative, even as they differentiate themselves, respectively, from its masculinist and heterosexist assumptions.

Antigone makes her first appearance in Irigaray's *Speculum* in her discussion of Freud's fetishism, a critique of which sets up the terms of Irigaray's engagement with Hegel's Antigone. Butler stages her investigation into "kinship trouble" (2000, 62) as a debate with Hegel and Lacan, a debate that retains kinship as its central focus, even as it reads Antigone as troubling Hegelian and Lacanian tenets. By the same token, the Eurocentric assumptions in which not only Hegel and Lacan are embedded, but also the tradition of white feminism that this tradition has spawned, remain largely untroubled.

Page DuBois calls for us to trouble this tradition in understanding what she designates the "structuring ubiquity of slaves in ancient society" (2003, 110). Arguing that the "invisibility and ubiquity" of slavery and slaves are "mutually constitutive" (6) of one another, DuBois suggests that we engage in various strategies of avoidance and deflection in order to purify our own past. Either we overlook, deny or disavow the presence or significance of slavery in order to sustain our idealized vision of ancient Greece, to which we trace our own cultural and democratic origins, or we vilify the ancients, projecting onto them our own anxiety about new world slavery (see 112, 118). Acknowledging that the "fetishizing of antiquity as a site of origin for Western culture may require the simultaneous recognition and disavowal of such a problematic feature of ancient societies as slavery" (10), DuBois makes a sustained argument for interpreting the "internal logic" of slavery (118), and for acknowledging it as an "inextricable part of the fabric of everyday life in classical Athens" (220). Given the permanence of war, and the way in which discourse on slavery versus freedom "saturates the political discourse of historians" such as Herodotus, Plutarch and Thucydides (see 128), it would be surprising if it did not also infuse the texts of the tragic poets. Thus, Euripides "presents through women characters anxiety about defeat in war, and about the declining political power of the elite" (141). While conventionally the overt concerns of Sophocles might not have been as readily identified with political issues as those of Euripides or Aeschylus, this might well be due to the political and genre assumptions in the disciplinary construction of classical studies, rather than to any inherent characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy, and the Oedipal cycle in particular. If slaves populate the pages of Euripides' plays much more regularly than

they do those of Sophocles, and if Aeschylus confronts more directly the status and function of juridical institutions, such as the Aeropogaus in the *Oresteia*, Sophocles' exploration of endogamous family relationships opens up pressing questions about the mutual implications of gender, class, and chattel slavery. Any resistance to construing these issues as political is bound up with a reluctance to politicize the classical study of these issues.

Even when critics explicitly comment on the language of slavery employed by Sophocles, some of them make no reference to the social institution of slavery, treating the language as if it were divorced from the social reality of slaves. Recounting several examples of Sophocles' utilization of the language of slavery in his exploration of the Sophoclean hero, including Creon's insistence that Antigone is a "slave" (*δουλός*) at 479, Bernard Knox interprets this language as evidence of "the fierce sense of independence of the thorny individual."<sup>24</sup> He assumes that it merely serves as an expression of the discomfort we all feel when we are opposed, but that the hero takes this to extremes. "All of us at times," he surmises, "may find the advice of others or the demands of a situation 'intolerable,' may assert our will in the face of opposition. But the hero does so all the way, to the absolute end of such a defiance, which is death" (1992, 41-2). For Knox, then, Sophoclean heroes "will not be ruled, no one shall have power over them, or treat them as a slave, they are free. . . . The choice, as the hero sees it, is between freedom and slavery" (40-1). Knox thereby eclipses the difference between the social situation of the ancient Greece, which was a slave society, and our own ("all of us" can understand what is at stake here), and reduces any significance that the language of slavery might have to the metaphorical level. While it is well established that the language of slavery can connote subjection in a general sense, and it might well be the case that this is indeed the sense in which Sophocles employs it here, it also seems more than worthwhile to wager that the language of slavery—even when used in this sense—resonated differently for women than it did for men, and for slaves than it did for those who were free.<sup>25</sup> By extension, it seems a safe bet to assume that it resonated differently for a slave culture than it might for us—and that the difficulty we have in recognizing this is bound up with our preference to omit serious reflection about the all too recent history of slavery in the new world.

I want to take seriously DuBois' argument about the difficulty that "readers living in postslave economies" have in seeing slaves (2003, 220), a difficulty compounded, as we shall see, by the fact that the investment

in various strategies of avoidance, minimization, or deflection can extend to translators, who write out references to slaves. It is not a question of substituting one focal point—the heteronormativity that Butler allows Antigone to bring into focus, for example—for another. Neither is it a question of arguing that race, rather than family or kinship, is the real object or unthought that Antigone brings to light. While the issues emphasized by the philosophical and psychoanalytic tradition (Hegel, Derrida, Lacan, Irigaray, and Butler)—family, kinship and sexual difference—are undoubtedly central to Sophocles' *Antigone*, one of the aims of this essay is to broaden the scope of enquiry to include a cluster of themes concerning slavery, outsiders, and foreigners. Part of what is at issue then is to refrain from imposing modern, western, identity categories such as "race," "gender," or "class" onto a context that preceded the reification of such categories, where issues of kinship, marriage, exchange, slavery, citizenship, foreignness, and so on, were not carved up into the discrete categories that contemporary discourse tends to impose on them. This will be a question of building on the readings of Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan, Irigaray and Butler, while at the same time problematizing some of the philosophical and psychoanalytic assumptions and blindspots of the tradition in which these readings are ensconced. By broadening the purview of questions beyond that of family and kinship, we need to ask how these themes have been developed in a particular direction that might have obscured or downplayed other concerns at stake both in Sophocles and in the theoretical tradition to which the Oedipal cycle has given rise. These concerns will prove to be entangled with the questions of kinship and gender that have taken precedence in recent debates, but taking them seriously will also require a reconfiguration not only of these contemporary questions but also of standard conceptions of *oikos* and *polis*, and accepted interpretations of *Antigone* as a tragedy. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet suggest that tragedy "confronts heroic values and ancient religious representations with the new modes of thought that characterize the advent of law within the city-state. The legends of the heroes are connected with royal lineages, noble *genē* that in terms of values, social practices, forms of religion, and types of human behavior, represent for the city-state the very things that it has had to condemn and reject and against which it has had to fight in order to establish itself. At the same time, however, they are what it developed from and it remains integrally linked with them" (1990, 26-7).<sup>26</sup> While such a view can clearly illuminate *Antigone*, it has been left largely up to other

critics such as Charles Segal to develop the general approach of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet in relation to this play.<sup>27</sup> Vernant and Vidal-Naquet attempt to grasp tragedy “as a phenomenon that is indissolubly social, aesthetic, and psychological” (1990, 9), yet neither they nor their followers have been immune from reproducing certain blindspots.<sup>28</sup>

One of the ways in which the rethinking of received wisdom concerning the structuring oppositions of *Antigone* can be accomplished is by taking seriously the literary, dramatic, performative, and political tradition that has been inspired by the figure of Antigone, a history in which Antigone has entered into myriad political contexts, serving as an inspiration for those fighting for freedom in the midst of injustice. Thus Antigone demands the attention of Jean Anouilh (1951) and Bertolt Brecht (1990) in Nazi torn Europe, of Seamus Heaney (2004), Aidan Mathews, Marianne McDonald (2005), Tom Paulin (1985), and Brendan Kennelly (1996) in the times of the troubles in Ireland, of Janusz Glowacki (1997) in the context of homelessness in New York, of Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona (1974) under apartheid in South Africa, and of Fémi Ôsófisan, (1999) under European imperialism in Nigeria. One could point to many other instances of *Antigone’s* appropriation in contexts of political crises, whether in The Congo (Sylvain Bemba 1990) or Argentina (Gambaro 1992). What would it mean to take such plays as a starting point, and re-read *Antigone* and the tradition of scholarship the play has spawned from the perspectives these plays make available? How might the critical distance such an exercise encourages allow a return to Sophocles, Aristotle, Hegel, Derrida, Lacan, Irigaray and Butler in such a way as to raise the question of what else might be left unthought by these interventions?

Of course, this tradition is not entirely impervious to the reflections of philosophers, and yet it maps out a rather different trajectory. Here, it is no longer a question of accepting the Hegelian opposition between kinship and state, or the Lacanian distinction between the symbolic and the social order as decisive. The theatrical legacy of Antigone is one that recognizes Antigone as standing up for a principle that a corrupt state has neglected, abandoned, or refused to legitimize. Antigone thus recalls a polity to what should have been its proper function, exposing the corruption or monstrosity of what the state has become. In particular, Antigone has lent her name to racially combustible situations, such as occur under apartheid and in the wake of the legacies of imperialism and colonialism. She recalls the state to its proper function, while also exposing the extent to which the state has deviated

from what should have been, but is not yet (or is no longer) its function. She calls for a future that has not arrived, calling out the impropriety of the state insofar as it falls short of a future yet to come. She calls attention to the logic whereby the state depends upon some of its members for certain vital functions, members whom it nonetheless systematically deprives of political rights. This logic, in its most extreme form, brings into question the humanity of those marginally included members, while appropriating from them some of the very assets that translate into the allegedly more secure, less questionable form of humanity that is conferred upon those granted full political rights. The ways in which humanity is parsed out depends crucially on fundamental failures of recognition on the part of those whose power to confer recognition matters. To the extent that the figure of Antigone has itself become embroiled in, and representative of, a western, hegemonic canon, she too has been appropriated in ways that consolidate, rather than disrupt, a tradition of thought that evades its own implication in slavery and colonialism.

As Derrida intimates when he interrupts his commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* with a biographical meditation on Hegel's life, Hegel's repressed desire for his sister dictates his insistence on portraying the brother-sister relationship as one of purity in his philosophical tracts. Hegel's philosophy would thereby appear to lay down the law that in his own life he seems to have transgressed. The brother-sister relationship must be the purest of all, because Hegel's own relationship to his own sister must remain unmixed with desire. The status of this imperative hovers between a retrospective re-installation of a law whose transgression calls for its reassertion, and an attempt to purify, or negate the pollution infecting the Oedipal line. Hegel's theoretical reflections would therefore be an attempt to rectify the contamination of *philia* with *eros* that the relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta had generated, at the same time as amounting to a sublimation of his own instincts, a philosophical attempt to impose order on the disorder that threatens to break out in his own life.

Sexual difference would seem to be the rock on which the movement of Hegel's dialectical philosophy founders. Spirit is the "ethical life of a people [Volks]" (1986, 142), and the family takes its place for Hegel within the "Volksgeist, the spirit of a people" (8). If the family "sacrifices" itself for the sake of the people (108), and if Hegel's "discourse on sexual difference belongs to the philosophy of nature" (114), sexual difference, it seems, is that which is naturalized. Sexual difference appears to be resistant to the



otherwise relentless succumbing of nature to spirit in Hegel's dialectical thinking. Antigone, as the sister, and Polynices, as the brother, are allotted their roles on the basis of their sex. In his reading of Hegel in *Glas*, Derrida interrogates this problem. He suggests that sexual difference is "overcome when the brother departs, and when the other (sister and wife) remains. There is no more sexual difference *as natural difference*" (167). Yet to suggest that the other, as both sister and wife *remains*, is to situate Antigone's alterity in a way that resists any resolution.

*Glas* is devoted to thinking through that which is remaindered (see 8) by Hegel, "the unthought or the excluded" (166), that which is "inadmissible in the system," or "what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible" (151), "[t]he system's vomit" (162). Given this, Derrida's suggestion that the other, figured indiscriminately as sister and wife, *remains*, should be read with care. Sexual difference is that which remains unsublated in Hegel's system. Antigone is precisely that which cannot be thought, that which cannot be sublated, but she is also that upon which, nevertheless, the system depends. Derrida asks, "Isn't there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility?" (162). For Derrida, Antigone is such an element in Hegel's system.

Antigone makes her entry onto the "scene" of Hegel's philosophical stage (145) in the left hand column of *Glas*, devoted to Hegel. Her entrance is paralleled with Derrida's commentary in the right hand column on the appearance of a tube of vaseline that Genet figures as "the very sign of abjection." (144). Like this object that "falls [*tombe*]" (144), Antigone falls away from the text, dropping out of Hegel's system, like so much "excrement" (39), covered with roses, kisses, and drool (146). She is hallowed and yet she is the deject of the system. She is elevated, yet she is left behind, a casualty of a system that cannot think her, yet cannot do without her, a system that requires her services, would not have survived without her, would not be what it is--at the very least its contours would have been markedly different.

Antigone is thus read, by Derrida, as Hegel's abject other. She is that which cannot be properly incorporated into the system. She offers resistance to it, remaining outside it, at once facilitating it and refusing its terms. She figures that which the system must render disposable, the waste product of his system, that without which Hegel's system would not be what it is, but whose final shape cannot tolerate her inclusion, finding no adequate means of representation for her. Antigone is assigned to the "law of singularity" and thus stands opposed to the "law of universality" (142), an opposition

that orders “a whole series of other couples: divine law/human law, family/city, woman/man, night/day, and so on” (142).

Sam Weber has explored the significance of Antigone’s appeal to the “law of singularity,” arguing that Antigone commemorates the loss of the singular, which is both a condition of the application of the law, and remains excessive to it (see 2004, 138-139). Weber introduces his discussion of the “nomos”—which he hesitates to translate as law—of Hegel’s Antigone in the context of a discussion of the rule of law in relation to individuality, drawing attention to the juridical tendency of the US, as opposed to the prevalence of political approaches in Europe, but at the same time alluding to the ease with which international law has been suspended in recent US history, as in its undertaking of preemptive war. In this respect, the rule of law appears to have given way to the rule of rule.

Emphasizing a certain ambiguity in the American tradition of law, Weber points to the tension residing in the celebration of the “individual” on the one hand, and that of the rule of law on the other hand (see 121). He finds this tension inscribed in Hegel’s dialectic (see 123). For Weber, both the state and the family are invested in their own individuality, and in so far as Creon and Antigone can be taken respectively to represent these institutions, they mirror one another. Their commitments, however, will also prove to be their inadequacy, since their very partiality will finally be their downfall. Reminding us of the importance of the fact that for Hegel Antigone’s truth, no less than Creon’s, is one confined to the level of immediacy (see 125 and 132), Weber concludes that both Creon and Antigone are at fault in so far as they both deny mediation, Antigone treating the family as an end in and of itself, and Creon treating the state qua government as an end in and of itself. Targeting Butler, perhaps, Hegel, Weber tells us, “never ‘takes sides’ . . . To identify the Hegelian interpretation of Antigone with the position of Creon, for instance, privileging the authority of the state over that of the family, is to ignore the dialectical structure of the Hegelian text” (125). Weber adds that “all the figures that people this [ethical] ‘world,’ Creon no less than Antigone are equally implicated in its limitations and therefore share its destiny” (125). While Weber is undoubtedly right to remind us that the “ethical spirit of the people” is for Hegel an “immediate truth” (125), and as such it must be surpassed through a resolution of the ethical world into the state of law, I part company with him when he draws the conclusion that *all* the figures of this world are *equally* implicated in its limitations.

War is the expedient by which the state attempts to secure its individuality (see 132). Yet since war elevates death to a heroic principle, the government is implicated in the power of divine law that Creon seeks to deny when he prohibits the burial of Polynices. To understand this implication, we must recall the significance Hegel attaches to burial. For Hegel, the act of burial accomplishes a transformation of the processes of natural degeneration to which the materiality of the corpse renders it susceptible. By taking this act of natural destruction on, through the burial of her brother, Antigone renders Polynices a member of the community, consecrating his memory. In so doing she transforms an act of nature into a conscious, spiritual act. Weber stipulates this in terms of two aspects. First, when Antigone buries Polynices, she acts as a family member who consecrates the memory of Polynices, taking on his death, such that it is not merely natural act of destruction, but is rather a commemoration of his membership in a community. Through the deed of burial, Antigone transforms her relationship to Polynices such that it is not merely a blood-relationship, which would qualify it as a natural relationship, but it becomes a conscious relationship, mediated, as it is, by Antigone's ministrations. Second, the divine law is tied to the individual as individual, and its power derives from the elemental.<sup>29</sup>

If we ask after the exact nature of this community into which Antigone ushers her dead brother, by transforming his death from a natural event into a conscious, spiritual one, through her recognition of him as a member of her family, two aspects emerge as particularly salient. First, the community into which Antigone seeks to welcome Polynices is the familial community, a community that is thereby irreducible to the blood relationship on which it is nonetheless based. Her bond with Polynices is based not on blood, but on love. Her act of burial testifies to this. In effect, then, Creon seeks to prevent Antigone's transformation of Polynices from a blood relative to a member of a community, where community is understood as family. Yet, is there not a further sense in which Antigone seeks to recognize Polynices as part of a community in burying him, one that comes to the fore once we focus on the fact that she differentiates Polynices from a slave? Antigone recognizes him as human, rather than a mere thing. She embraces him into the fold of humanity, as opposed to the merely inanimate. In order to do so she must make a distinction between the humanity of Polynices and the humanity of a slave, a distinction that works to the detriment of the slave.

The community into which Antigone ushers Polynices through her performance of burial rites, and her absolutely rigid insistence on recognizing her brother's humanity in this way, is, at the same time, a refusal to have her brother assume the status of a slave. For the status of a slave, in Greek society is precisely debatable, hovering between beast, inanimate tool, and subhumanity. The difference between a thing and a slave does not appear to have constituted a reliable distinction in fifth century BC Athens, and this instability is perhaps exacerbated in the mythical Thebes staged so regularly by the Greek tragedians, onto which problems about the political, moral and religious life of Athens are projected.<sup>30</sup> To honor the body in death, is intimately connected to honoring the body in life. If, in life, the bodies of slaves were routinely subjected to beating, on the pretext of the need for discipline, the dishonoring of the body in death—such as the treatment to which Polynices' corpse is subjected—would blur the line between his humanity and that of slaves. Since the humanity of slaves was constantly put in question through attempts to justify slavery, so too the humanity of Polynices would appear to be in doubt. In so far as Antigone takes for granted the distinction between slaves and free citizens, the blindness of her own motives must also be called into question.

It turns out, then, that the contaminating abjection spread by Polynices's corpse, which Derrida reads as having infected Antigone, who thereby becomes deject, is in fact purified through Antigone's act of burial. The purification takes place at the expense of another deject, one whose presence has been systematically written out of the text of *Antigone*. That deject is the generic slave, who, unlike Polynices, can remain unburied with impunity, and whose exposure does not seem to cause any unease, least of all for Antigone. When Ôsófisán marks Antigone's colonial, European heritage, asking after the color of mythology, and when he has the black body of Tègònni's brother remain exposed, he is not merely transposing Sophocles' Antigone into the contemporary concerns of Nigeria. He is, at the same time, uncovering the theme of slavery that has been buried, along with Antigone's burial of Polynices, in the annals of scholarly, tragic interpretation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Huff, "Archaeological Evidence of Zoroastrian Funerary Practices," in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Boston: Brill, 2004), 593-630. See also Robert W. Habensetin and William M. Lamers, *Funeral Customs the World Over* (Milwaukee:

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Bulfin Printers, 1960), 181.

<sup>2</sup> Rabinowitz suggests that the “resistance to seeing Greek society as a ‘slave society’” in the nineteenth century was linked to the abolitionist movement, while the Cold war provided the context “for more recent discussions” (1998, 56).

<sup>3</sup> My observation about the paradox between democracy and slavery is not, of course, unprecedented. According to Yvon Garlan, “Considered theoretically indispensable to the fulfillment of free men, servile labor . . . does appear to have played a determining role . . . in places where we can form the clearest picture, that is, in classical Athens . . . it is . . . undeniable that chattel slavery in classical Athens and communal servitude of one type or another elsewhere did constitute the ‘basis’ of Greek society or—to put it another way—the necessary element for it to affirm its identity” (1988, 144). In an article originally published in 1941, Gregory Vlastos comments on “the real contradiction in Athenian society: a free political community that rested on a slave economy” (1981, 153) and goes on to say “that a consistent democratic philosophy would repudiate slavery altogether” (162). As Page du Bois observes however, Vlastos distanced himself from his earlier arguments in a 1959 postscript, “undoubtedly affected by the postwar climate of the United States in the Eisenhower fifties” (2003, 166). My focus here is on how slavery and related themes plays out in Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

<sup>4</sup> As Fisher says, Athenian men imposed on women “strict codes of chastity and marital fidelity in order to preserve the reputation of the family, and to prevent there being any hint of doubt about the parentage of children. . . . a respectable woman had to have a male relative in authority over her as her legal guardian (*kyrios*) throughout her life . . . Women were thought to derive more pleasure from sex than men, and be more lacking in moral self-control . . . Equally, women were widely supposed to be more likely than men to be ‘enslaved’ to the pleasures of food and especially drink, to be excessively emotional, to be weak, cowardly and fearful, and to be unable to develop rational arguments” (1993, 105-6).

<sup>5</sup> Since Dionysos is the god of fertility, *Antigone* flouts both of the gods to whom the chorus of *Antigone* appeals (the other being the god of Eros).

<sup>6</sup> As Froma Zeitlin says, in *Oedipus at Colonus* the daughters of Oedipus tend him “despite the social conventions that would keep them safely at home” (1990, 159).

<sup>7</sup> See Rubin 1975. See also Kirk Ormand on the symbolic staging of death as marriage (1999).

<sup>8</sup> See Zeitlin (1990, 131, 138, 158).

<sup>9</sup> “To work for another was what slaves did . . . Athenians wished to avoid seeming ‘slavish’ through being too dependent on their own desires and passions, particularly those associated with the body” (Fisher 1993, 101-3).

<sup>10</sup> This ambiguity as to whether the marking or branding of his body is a result of divine intervention or rather due to Oedipus’s own efforts could be read as a commentary on whether slaves were born to slavery or whether they suffered slavery as their just desert.

<sup>11</sup> While there is a rich scholarly tradition that takes up the theme of *deinos*, and the uncanny, this tradition has not pursued the social and political implications of the status of strangers in ancient Greece.

<sup>12</sup> While establishing the true identity of one’s children might seem to be a peculiarly male anxiety, in the light of the fact that adoption was an accepted practice in fifth century BC Athens, in addition to the widespread existence of slavery, and the common practice of Athenian citizens mating with slaves, it should not perhaps be seen as the exclusive preserve of men.

<sup>13</sup> In some ways Oedipus embodies the same trope explored by Homer in the figure of Odysseus, who also returns home after a long absence, provoking ambiguity around the question of familial recognition, an ambiguity that is finally resolved through bodily scarring, but whereas Homer's *Odyssey* entertains the tension between foreign suitors and Odysseus, and the dangers confronted by Penelope and Telemachos, so that Odysseus feels it incumbent upon him to return in disguise, Sophocles employs the mechanism of having Oedipus's parents send him away so that he himself is ignorant of his identity. Not only does his family fail to recognize him, but he fails to recognize them, and it is this mutual failure of recognition that throws into crisis the normative familial boundaries that might have obtained otherwise. Sophocles' uses the failure of both self-knowledge and knowledge of the other to comment on, and perhaps warn against the growing tendency to marry one's own, a tendency that is liable to become culturally incestuous, in addition to its more overt dangers. The irony of the somewhat inward-looking traits of Sophocles' interpreters is that the cultural narcissism against which Sophocles can be read as warning appears to have been lost on an entire interpretive western tradition, so much so that some of those who champion above all else reading the canon—and Sophocles is nothing if not canonical—align themselves with ideologies of exclusivity intent on keeping out the foreigners, as it were.

For a different, but compelling reading, see Zeitlin, who develops the relationship between autochthony and incest, and who suggests that Oedipus "qualifies himself for the role of an adopted stranger who will henceforth protect the city, one who will in the future distinguish between insiders and outsiders on the basis, not of any given status, but of actions and intentions" (1990, 161).

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant says "In his speech Against Neera, Demosthenes cites the law (dating from 451) that forbids a foreigner to sunoikein and paidopoieisthai with an Athenian woman and have children by her (1990, 57).

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch says that Pericles "proposed a law that only those who could claim Athenian parentage on both sides should be counted as Athenian citizens . . . As a result nearly five thousand people were convicted and sold into slavery" Pericles 37 (1960, 203-4). See also Rabinowitz (1993, 3).

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant (1990, 57, 67).

<sup>17</sup> Vernant and Vidal-Naquet point out that Sophocles himself was affected by this law (1990, 303).

<sup>18</sup> I extrapolate this scenario from observations made by Garlan, who points to an exception to the general rule that a "slave could not be a former member of the civic body," namely that "newborn infants" could be handed over by poor citizens to "magistrates, who then sold them as slaves." This was the alternative to the "exposure of infants" which "was forbidden—in Thebes for instance" (1988, 45). See also Fisher, who says of fifth century BC Athens, "Some infants of Greek birth may have been exposed because of their parents' poverty or because they were unwanted bastards, and then found and sold to be slaves. How often this happened is unknown; but the chances of any such slaves being 'recognised' by their original families and restored to freedom were minimal, despite the prevalence of this pattern in the plots of Greek plays" (1993, 36). See also Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990, 127.

<sup>19</sup> Harris (1997, 223).

<sup>20</sup> To the extent that anxiety was prevalent due to the possibility that anyone might become a slave due to capture as a result of war, one might read the amassing of wealth and culture within the polity of Athens as a defense against slavery. The fact that the aristocratic, free

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way of life depended upon the perpetuation of slavery within Athens only serves to reinforce the distinction between those who were enslaved, and those who enslaved, a distinction that Antigone also seeks to reinforce in order to make the case to bury her brother.

21 Vernant points out that the distinction “between the nothos and the gnēsios is in no way an absolute one,” and shows that illegitimate offspring were frequently held in high regard (see 1990, 63).

22 See Rabinowitz (1993, 4).

23 Antigone’s identification with her mother is symbolized by her suicide: as many critics have noted, she will eventually hang herself, like her mother.

24 Knox 1992, 40.

25 Vlastos suggests that it was not until Plato that the connotation of subjection in a kindly way became well established, which argues in favor of Sophocles’ use of *doulos* and related terms in a more literal way (1981, 150).

26 See also Hamilton who quotes Vernant and goes on to point out that, “Antigone’s name reveals her function. Anti- can mean ‘opposed to’ or ‘in compensation for’. The *gen-/gon-* root is cognate with *genos*, ‘lineage’, and *gonē* can even mean ‘womb’. Antigone’s action validates kinship based on the womb in compensation for its being dishonored; she restores an equilibrium of honor to ‘those from the same womb.’ . . . In another sense, however, she opposes the *genē* ‘lineages,’ bloodlines. She is indifferent to Haimon, chooses virginity in death, and opposes in her simple ritual for a dead kinsman the massive burial associated with the funerals of the royal *genē*” (1991, 87-95).

27 Charles Segal, “Antigone: Death and Love, Hades and Dionysus,” in *Tragedy and Civilization*. See also Zeitlin (1990). Simon Goldhill and Nicole Loraux are amongst those who have developed and built on Vernant and Vidal-Naquet’s approach in a variety of ways.

28 See, for example, David Wiles, who, in an otherwise interesting argument that he casts in opposition to the “positivist” (1997, 13) approach of Oliver Taplin (2003), appeals to an apparently unproblematic assumption about outsiders—one that I would want to say is precisely at stake in the very tragedies he is discussing—when he pits “Plato the Athenian” against “Aristotle the cultural outsider” (9). To be sure, Wiles’ argument plays out in terms of Plato’s experience of tragic performance, versus Aristotle’s lack thereof: “Plato, unlike Aristotle, grew up in Athens and experienced fifth-century drama. He conceives tragedy as an event rather than a text” (87). My point, however, is that Wiles neglects the ways in which the notion of outsider is implicated in ideas concerning the barbarian other, foreignness and slavery. The same can be said with regard to slavery of Zeitlin’s otherwise excellent and exhaustive essay, “Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama.” Although it proposes that “Thebes is the place . . . that makes problematic every inclusion and exclusion, every conjunction and disjunction, every relation between near and far, high and low, inside and outside, stranger and kin” (1990, 134), slavery is not considered to be implicated in these themes. Similarly, the discussion of marriage by Vernant and Vidal-Naquet does a wonderful job of tracing the transition from exogamy to endogamy, but neglects its implications for slavery.

29 See Weber (2004, 126-7).

30 See Zeitlin 1990.

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